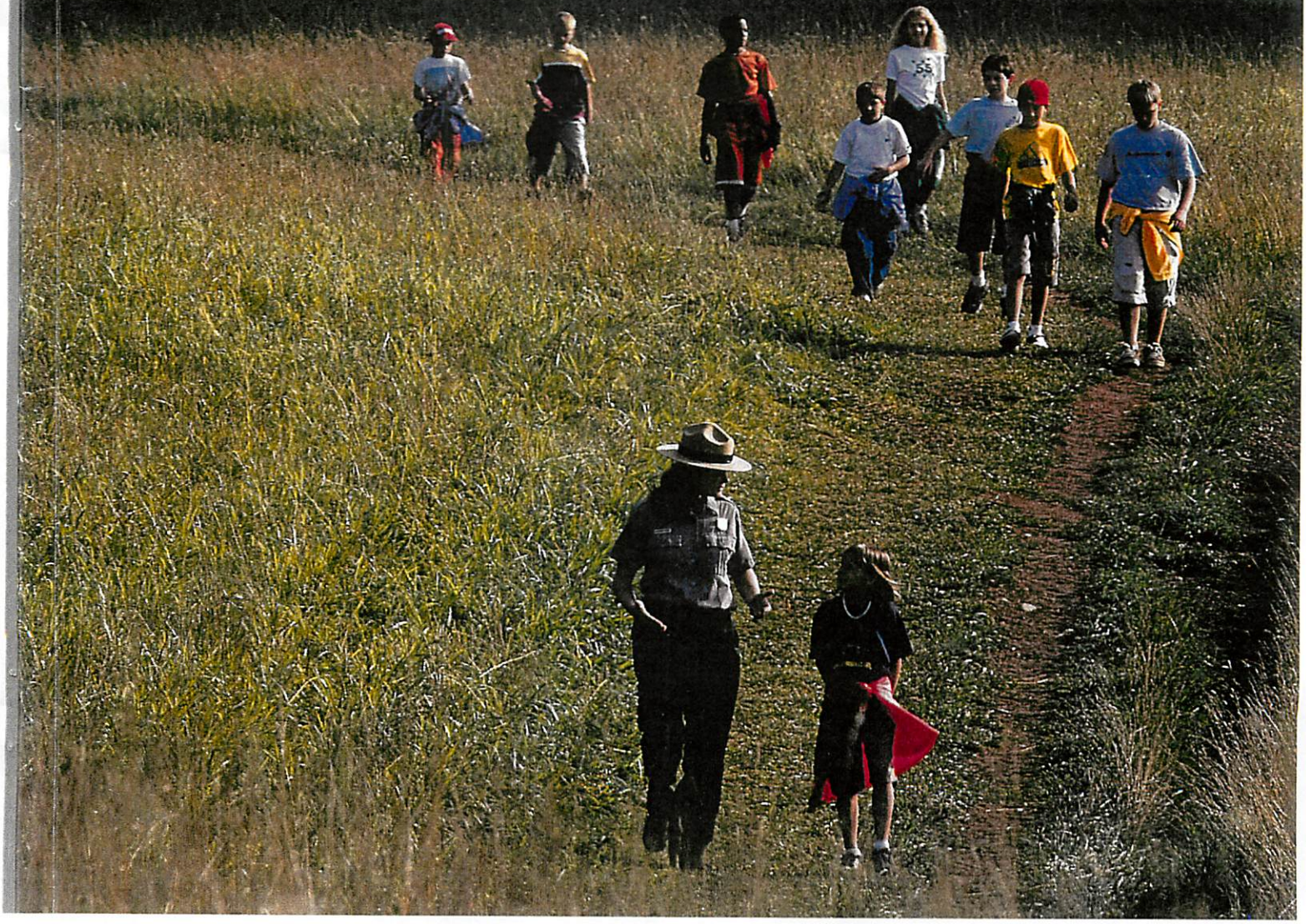
NATIONAL PARK SYSTEM ADVISORY BOARD REPORT 2001

Rethinking the National Parks for the 21st Century



National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior

Rethinking the National Parks for the 21st Century

Foreward

In December 1999, the Director of the National Park Service asked the National Park System Advisory Board to "develop a report that should focus broadly on the purposes and prospects for the National Park System for the next 25 years." This is that report.

The Board is a congressionally chartered body of twelve citizens appointed by the Secretary of the Interior. Established under the Historic Sites Act of 1935, it is charged to provide advice on matters relating to operations in the parks and management of the National Park Service.

In developing this report, the full Board met five times and subcommittees of board members an additional eight times. The Board consulted with representatives of organizations concerned about national parks, academics knowledgeable about park issues, and National Park Service employees working in the parks and in park service administrative offices nationwide. The Board collaborated with the National Geographic Society to produce this report.

Though the world has changed profoundly since the first national parks were created more than a century ago; the national park idea continues to provide benefits of fundamental importance to the nation. So, too, does an array of programs now administered by the Park Service that extends these benefits to virtually every community in America. In looking to the future we must see to it as a nation and as a people that the National Park System and the national park idea continue to flourish.

John Hope Franklin
Chair, National Park Service Advisory Board

Rethinking the National Parks for the 21st Century
A Report of the National Park System Advisory Board
July 2001

The creation of a national park is an expression of faith in the future. It is a pact between generations, a promise from the past to the future. In 1916, Congress established the National Park Service to conserve the parks "unimpaired for the enjoyment of future generations." This act and the many others that have created the National Park Service and related programs echoes the promise of the Constitution "to secure the Blessings of Liberty for ourselves and our Posterity." We are that future, and we too must act on behalf of our successors. We must envision and ensure a system of parks and programs that benefits a new generation of citizens in a changing world.

National parks are greatly admired. Inspiring us, uplifting our spirits, they serve as powerful reminders of our national origins and destiny. Yet there are opportunities unfulfilled. The parks should reach broader segments of society in ways that make them more meaningful in the life of the nation.

As a nation, we are re-examining the effectiveness of our educational institutions. The Park Service should be viewed as such an institution. Parks are places to demonstrate the principles of biology, to illustrate the national experience as history, to engage formal and informal learners throughout their lifetime, and to do these things while challenging them in exciting and motivating settings. Parks are places to stimulate an understanding of history in its larger context, not just as human experience, but as the sum of the interconnection of all living things and forces that shape the earth.

When Yellowstone National Park was established in 1872, it signaled a new way the world would view its land and, eventually, its seas. A youthful, growing nation absorbed in westward expansion had set aside two million acres on which no one could lawfully settle, extract minerals or timber, and-after the turn of the 19th century-even hunt. This truly American idea later spread to other nations.

National parks in America succeeded beyond their originators' wildest dreams. By the mid-20th century, they were meccas for warm-weather vacationists. A summer pilgrimage to the great parks of the West was a rite of passage for the American family. For some it was a journey of hope to understand the American way of life; for others, to rediscover their place in the natural world. A third of all adults of this country have visited a unit of the National Park Service sometime within the past two years. Surveys show visitors give the parks an approval rating of 95 percent for their inspiring sights, useful information, and helpful personnel. The experience is often powerful and sometimes memorable over a lifetime.

In these days of concern about personal safety, national parks are considered safe places to take a family. In an era of glitz and technological wizardry, they awe people with natural wonders, authentic places, and dramatic stories. At a time of public cynicism about many matters on the national scene, opinion surveys indicate that the Park Service enjoys one of the highest public approval ratings of all government agencies.

From the beginning the Park Service has sought to be people-friendly. The leadership of the new organization realized that the best way to engender support for the parks was to ensure that the visitors "enjoyed" them. They set about providing facilities to promote a positive experience. They were successful.

Managing for people, however, had an effect on some areas the Service was supposed to protect. Villages sprang up in wild places. Fish populations were manipulated to enhance sportfishing. Popular species of ungulates such as bison, elk, moose, and bighorn sheep were protected, while predators such as wolves and mountain lions were trapped and shot. (Bears came into favor once tourists showed a fancy for feeding them and watching them scavenge at garbage dumps.) Forest fires were suppressed, despite warnings that the buildup of debris would fuel more destructive conflagrations.

It is time to re-examine the "enjoyment equals support" equation and to encourage public support of resource protection at a higher level of understanding. In giving priority to visitor services, the Park Service has paid less attention to the resources it is obliged to protect for future generations. As a result, few parks have adequate inventories of flora and fauna. Most archaeological sites in the system have not been surveyed. These oversights must not continue. A sophisticated knowledge of resources and their condition is essential. The Service must gain this knowledge through extensive collaboration with other agencies and academia, and its findings must be communicated to the public. For it is the broader public that will decide the fate of these resources.

The National Park System has grown dramatically since the first parks were created. It now consists of more than 380 units in every state but Delaware. Parks preserve geologic splendors, historic sites and structures, recreational spaces in and around large urban areas, lakes and seashores, long-distance trails, free-flowing rivers, and places that chronicle the nation's social history. Moreover, the role of the Service has greatly expanded. Today, it is at work in communities across America, helping local citizens preserve their own heritage and recreation lands. Grants and assistance are offered to register, record and save historic places, to create state and community parks, trails and greenways, and to build local recreation facilities. The Service also consults with other nations in establishing and operating their parks and protected areas, many of which are patterned after America's National Park Service.

The public looks upon national parks almost as a metaphor for America itself. But there is another image emerging here, a picture of the National Park Service as a sleeping giant-beloved and respected, yes; but perhaps too cautious, too resistant to change, too reluctant to engage the challenges that must be addressed in the 21st century.

We are a species whose influence on natural systems is profound, yet the consequences of this influence remain only dimly understood. Our increased numbers have altered terrestrial and marine systems, strained resources and caused extinction rates never before seen. As developed landscapes press against or surround many parks, pollutants in both the air and water impact park resources. Our growing numbers encourage a drifting away from knowledge about nature and our own history as a nation and a people.

The times call for respected voices to join in confronting these issues-voices that can educate and inspire, leading to greater self-awareness and national pride. The National Park Service should be one of these voices.

The National Park System Advisory Board, therefore, recommends that the National Park Service:

- Embrace its mission, as educator, to become a more significant part of America's educational syste by providing formal and informal programs for students and learners of all ages inside and outside park boundaries.
- Encourage the study of the American past, developing programs based on current scholarship, linking specific places to the narrative of our history, and encouraging a public exploration and discussion of the American experience.
- Adopt the conservation of biodiversity as a core principle in carrying out its preservation mandate ar participate in efforts to protect marine as well as terrestrial resources.
- Advance the principles of sustainability, while first practicing what is preached.
- Actively acknowledge the connections between native cultures and the parks, and assure that no relevant chapter in the American heritage experience remains unopened.
- Encourage collaboration among park and recreation systems at every level-Federal, regional, state, local-in order to help build an outdoor recreation network accessible to all Americans.
- Improve the Service's institutional capacity by developing new organizational talents and abilities ar a workforce that reflects America's diversity.

This report, built around the challenges just cited, is an attempt to look afresh at the Park Service; the social, cultural, and political environment within which it operates, and the ways it can serve the American public more effectively. The Advisory Board clearly has made certain assumptions in developing the report. It assumes that our growing population will continue to exert pressures on all park preserves-national, state and local-and that these places will become more special, even precious, in the future. It assumes that Congress's description of the National Park System as "cumulative expressions of a single national heritage" has continuing relevance as we think about the evolving purposes of parks and the role of humans in them. It assumes that parks of all kinds can no longer be thought of as islands with little or no connection, cultural or ecological, to their surroundings. And, finally, it assumes that the National Park Service should fulfill, to a much greater degree than at present, the education potential its creators envisioned eighty-five years ago.

I. Building Pathways to Learning

- Education should become a primary mission of the National Park Service. Budgets, policies, and organizational structure should reflect this commitment.
- Collaboration with organizations and scholars is essential to develop and expand the Service's educational capacity.

The National Park Service has been called "America's greatest university without walls." It includes many of the world's most magnificent landscapes, a rich diversity of plant and animal life, some of the finest examples of American culture, and historic objects and places that reflect the most important events in American history. Parks contain information that does not exist anywhere else. They are powerful resources offering unique, place-based learning opportunities.

The Park Service has always considered education to be a part of its mission, but has focused on it only intermittently. As the demographics of America have changed, so too must the Park Service's educational efforts. Programs, exhibits, and audiovisual presentations must be developed for different ages and in multiple languages. New methods are needed to reach audiences from disparate cultures. New technologies, such as the Internet, are creating different and exciting ways of teaching and learning in and about parks. Through the Internet and other forms of distance learning, the public can

share the wonder and excitement of a park visit. The Park Service should embrace the educational possibilities of the World Wide Web in a more systematic fashion.

National Parks preserve some of the best examples of biomes that were once widespread. In a textbook, a biome is a word and an illustration. In a park it becomes a working partnership of stream and forest, fish and crustacean, bird and insect. It is also a system in which people play a major part-a fact lost on most school children and many of our citizens. Parks can help us understand humanity's relationship to the natural world. Holding a salamander in Congaree Swamp, hearing the howl of a gray wolf on Isle Royale, or watching the fall migration of sandhill cranes in Denali can remind us that we are but a part of a large and infinitely complex living system.

Historic sites and monuments are not abstractions, they are the fabric that binds America's past and present. A Revolutionary War battle is merely words and lithographs until you see the terrain as patriots saw it, stand on ground once drenched with their blood, and hear the words of those who lived it. Understanding the relevance of past experiences to present conditions allows us to confront today's issues with a deeper awareness of the alternatives before us. Standing in front of Little Rock's Central High School or in Topeka's Monroe School or on the Edmund Pettus Bridge in Selma makes the Civil Rights era come alive, and strengthens our sense of the past, of the many voices of which it is made. Walking the desert landscape of Manzanar or the rolling plains of Washita Battlefield makes us think differently about what we have to learn from the echoes of that past.

Educators tell us that linking classroom learning with experiences in the field produces better results. When what is learned in school is connected to nature's classroom, or the classrooms of historic sites, students better remember content, gain stronger skills, and adopt new values and behaviors. Over the years, Park Service staff assisted by educators, scientists, historians, and volunteers have developed exciting and effective field-based teaching techniques.

At Great Smoky Mountains National Park, high school and university students are helping catalogue species, an exercise that not only provides a much-needed inventory but also points the way into careers in biology. (A live moth trap devised by students has resulted in discovery of many new species of moths.) And in Lowell, Massachusetts, the Tsongas Industrial History Center represents a partnership between the Lowell National Historical Park and University of Massachusetts Lowell Graduate School of Education. At the Center, students can explore how canals advanced industrial expansion in the 19th century and re-enact, through role-playing episodes, the experiences of immigrant factory workers. These examples of parks as part of the education process can and should be expanded to serve schools all over the country.

Learning, however, is not limited to schools and colleges and universities. It is a life-long undertaking, our formal education marking only a beginning point. Parks offer citizens of all ages opportunities to strengthen their connections to the environment and to renew their sense of wonder and appreciation for our democracy.

II. Bringing America's History Alive

- The National Park Service should establish a high-profile program that explores American history at the places where history happened, both inside and outside our national parks.
- The Service should ensure that national park programs relate to broad historical themes and to a context that is larger than any individual park.
- The Service should present human and environmental history as seamlessly connected. How one shaped the other is the story of America; they are indivisible.

While many Americans associate the Park Service with the preservation of pristine natural places, few realize that almost two-thirds of the national parks-Gettysburg, San Antonio Missions, Valley Forge, the Frederick Douglass House, and Little Bighorn, to name a few-were designated specifically to preserve an important aspect or moment in our nation's history.

Moreover, the Service is directed by law to assist with historic preservation beyond park boundaries-on all federal lands, on tribal reservations, and in the public and private sectors. Its responsibilities include administering the National Historic Landmarks program, which has designated more than 2,300 nationally significant properties since 1935, and the National Register of Historic Places, which now includes more than seventy thousand sites. The Service provides matching grants to restore public and privately owned historic places through the Historic Preservation Fund. The NPS-administered Historic Preservation Tax Incentives program, which encourages the preservation of historic places in town and city centers, has accounted for more than $23 billion in private investment nationwide since 1976.

In many ways, the National Park Service is our nation's Department of Heritage.

Our historical heritage, however, faces important challenges in the 21st century. Many sites and structures have been degraded by neglect and vandalism; others are at risk because of inadequate budgetary support or insensitive national, state, and local policies. Development encroaches upon our battlefields. Historic neighborhood schools are abandoned. Prehistoric archeological resources are looted or vandalized. Suburban sprawl consumes historic farmsteads and rural landscapes. Acid rain eats at cemetery stones, memorials, and monuments.

America may be losing something else-its historic literacy. Of some 556 seniors surveyed at 55 of the nation's top colleges and universities, only 60 percent placed the American Civil War in the correct half of the 19th century. Only 34 percent identified George Washington as the American general at the Revolutionary War battle of Yorktown-37 percent thought the general was Ulysses S. Grant. At 78 percent of the institutions polled, no history whatsoever was required as part of the undergraduate program. "It is not surprising," states the report by the American Council of Trustees and Alumni, "that college seniors know little American history. Few students leave high school with an adequate knowledge of American history, and even the best colleges and universities do nothing to close the knowledge gap." As historian David McCullough observed in the same report, "We are raising a generation of young Americans who are historically illiterate."

At the same time, another study found that many Americans not only feel a strong connection to their past but hold historic sites and museums to be their most trustworthy sources of historical information, above movies, television, college professors, and even personal accounts from relatives.

The study of our nation's history, formal and informal, is an essential part of our civic education. In a democratic society such as ours, it is important to understand the journey of liberty and justice, together with the economic, social, religious, and other forces that barred or opened the ways for our ancestors, and the distances yet to be covered. Visits to historic places, whether managed by the Park Service or by others, allow us to take the measure of our history in immediate ways. Parks should be not just recreational destinations but springboards for personal journeys of intellectual and cultural enrichment.

The Park Service must ensure that the American story is told faithfully, completely, and accurately. The story is often noble, but sometimes shameful and sad. In an age of growing cultural diversity, the Service must continually ask whether the way in which it tells these stories has meaning for all our citizens. The Service must look anew at the process and make improvements. For example, the relationship between environmental and human history should be seamlessly presented as inseparable chapters of our life on this planet.

To the National Park Service, the challenge is critical. Our nation's history is our civic glue. Without it, our national character is diminished.

III. Protecting Nature, Protecting Ourselves

- The National Park Service's statutory mandate to preserve park resources "unimpaired" requires greatly increased focus on the conservation of natural systems and the biodiversity they encompass
- The Service should pay special attention to the protection of aquatic and marine systems. It should be an active partner in a national and international dialogue to develop a strategy for marine resour protection and restoration.

- The Service should be an active participant in efforts to restore wildlife corridors to provide biologica linkages among habitats throughout North America.
- The Service should assign greater value to its botanical and zoological reference collections-many which urgently need better care-and link them to global biological inventories.

For most of the first century of the national park experience, populations of plants and animals on land seemed infinite, and, with the oceans so vast, any peril to life beneath the waves seemed inconceivable. That attitude began to change in 1963 when wildlife biologist A. Starker Leopold reported that the National Park Service should "recognize the enormous complexity of ecologic communities and the diversity of management procedures required to preserve them." Leopold urged the Service to embrace "naturalness" by encouraging native plants and animals, discouraging nonnative species, and minimizing human intrusions. A parallel report by the National Academy of Sciences released in the same year criticized the Service's failure to support science in the parks.

Debate over the lack of science-based resource management continued, but the Park Service made little progress during the last three decades in acquiring solid knowledge about park resources. Though criticism for this omission has mounted, science still takes a back seat in the parks.

From time to time, however, a few cogent messages have been issued from that back seat. Early research into fire as a natural process taught the Service that vegetation, a key component of scenery, is dynamic, not static. The unforeseen results of early park predator control led to an understanding that wildlife populations are not static either. The "scenery and the natural and historic objects and the wild life therein" that the Service is mandated to conserve were revealed as a dynamic assembly of players and processes. Plants and animals are the players, responding to each other and to environmental processes special to each place. Historians tell us that "wild life," as used by Congress when framing the Service's 1916 Organic Act, meant plants as well as animals-the biodiversity of the national parks. The conservation of park wild life "unimpaired," as directed by law, compels the Park Service to protect biodiversity.

In the face of ever diminishing biodiversity throughout the world, our national parks should be models of healthy, natural, sustainable ecosystems. The message that a robust park system has social and economic as well as ecological benefits should be aggressively proclaimed and exported. But to remain healthy, the Service must first know what resources they have. The long-delayed scientific inventories of invertebrates and microbes in the national parks, now just getting underway, must be accelerated to determine which species are aboard and which ones need focused protection. Conservation of biodiversity should become a core purpose of park management. At present, it is not. Better care is required of biological reference collections, which should be made available through Internet technologies.

Actions to preserve biodiversity cannot be limited to park areas, for parks are often parts of larger ecosystems that encompass them. To encourage ecological stewardship outside the parks, the Service should cooperate extensively with its neighbors-federal agencies, states, counties, cities, tribes, the private sector, even other countries. Parks cannot survive as islands of biodiversity. They need to be linked with other natural areas through wildlife migratory corridors and greenways. These connections can only be created through partnerships. The National Park Service should become an active participant in a national effort to create such connections.

If human stewardship has been lax on land, it has been even worse in the sea. A separate environment lies beneath the water off our shores, but we know little of it and seem to care less because it cannot readily be seen. And the marine world may be degrading faster than our terrestrial one as pollutants pour into it from the land and sky, and stocks of many species decline from overfishing. Salt marshes at the land-sea interface are nurseries for many commercially valuable fish species, yet shoreline development continues to jeopardize their future viability.

Our freshwater and marine systems are losing biodiversity faster than terrestrial ones. Three-quarters of American crayfish species and 60 percent of native freshwater fish species are on a threatened or

endangered species list (state or federal). Native trout-dwellers of cold, clear water-are now missing from many streams. Everywhere, both within and beyond park boundaries, the Service should play a larger role in alerting the public to the conditions in our watersheds and along our coasts.

Together, U.S. national marine sanctuaries, national wildlife refuges, and national parks cover only a fraction of the marine environment that is in need of protection. Even within this fraction, there are very few areas that offer full protection from extractive use. Commercial and recreational fishing pressure has been intense within national marine sanctuaries and many parks and refuges. In fact, the significant loss of top predators due to fishing pressure threatens the long-term future of fishing in these areas.

There is a long-held and erroneous belief that marine systems are so vast that their resources cannot be affected by human activities. Current assessments of marine habitats, fisheries, and water quality show otherwise, demonstrating dramatic declines in the health of marine ecosystems worldwide. Forty-four percent of recognized marine fisheries are at maximum limits, 22 percent are overexploited. Networks of no-take marine reserves-areas where extractive use is prohibited-are one of our only tools for ensuring that future generations will be able to continue to enjoy sustainable use of marine resources. Evidence of the success of such reserves can be seen in areas such as the Channel Islands National Park, where no-take zone boundaries are strictly enforced. Marine creatures inside the boundaries of these areas have thrived, proving that they, like many land mammals, are sufficiently territorial and can benefit from full protection. In addition, these reserves can act as engines for sustaining adjacent fisheries.

To ensure the long-term survival and health of our marine systems, we must create a strategically designed system of no-take marine reserves, covering a broad range of representative marine habitats, especially those important to spawning. The Park Service, as one of the federal agencies focused on conserving wildlife for future generations, should play a leadership role in developing and implementing such a system.

Marine protected areas, like upland parks, will only be saved in the long run by the enlightened support of the public. The Park Service should think beyond the vision of maintaining sustainable parks to encourage sustainable communities and ecosystems with parks as a part of them.

IV. Pursuing and Teaching Sustainability

- The National Park Service should adopt policies, create partnerships, and train its workforce to mak sustainability integral to all its operations.
- The Service should establish Centers for Environmental Innovation that showcase sustainable technologies and practices and educate the public about their benefits and values.
- The Service should monitor and interpret the ecological "footprint" of park development and use anc chronicle attempts to reduce it.

All across America today, smart, progressive businesses, industries, and communities know that environmental management is central to the conduct of everyday operations. They understand that environmental issues can be key components, rather than consequences, of business processes.

Sustainability is about planning and carrying out our day-to-day work with full consideration of how environmental factors affect long-term goals. It means eliminating waste and developing energy flows and cycles that comport with natural processes. How and what we design and build, the way in which we operate and maintain our facilities, and how we use and conserve energy all have tremendous impacts not only on the environment but also on the economic "bottom line." Applying sustainable development principles throughout society lowers long-term maintenance and operating costs and improves the quality of life.

Programs in energy efficiency and recycling have gained in popularity in recent years, and dedicated innovators in government and the private sector must help develop more of them. The Park Service can

become a leader in modeling sustainability. While parks have implemented some measures aimed at curbing pollution, saving fuels, and reducing waste, these efforts remain scattered and unsystemic. A sweeping, Service-wide commitment is needed. With nearly 300 million visitors each year, national parks are ideally suited to showcase exemplary environmental practices that demonstrate the value and fundamental wisdom of maintaining healthy, functioning natural systems.

National parks should serve as Centers for Environmental Innovation, places that display energy-efficient mass transit, use of recycled materials and "green" products, passive heating and cooling systems, model composting and alternative energy solutions, and better use of natural light. Educational and interactive displays could augment model installations, allowing the public to understand the benefits of new technologies. Computers could track and generate information on park staff and visitor energy usage and ways to curb it. Partners-in-waiting for these demonstrations include business and industry, academia, and the Federal government's Environmental Protection Agency, NASA, the national laboratories, and Departments of Energy and Defense.

V. Nurturing Living Cultures and Communities

- The National Park Service should help conserve the irreplaceable connections that ancestral and indigenous people have with the parks. These connections should be nurtured for future generation
- Parks should become sanctuaries for expressing and reclaiming ancient feelings of place.
- Efforts should be made to connect these peoples with parks and other areas of special significance strengthen their living cultures. Such efforts should include access by Native Americans to sacred sites and the use of ecologically sustainable cultural practices and traditions.
- A formal Heritage Areas program should be established to support partnerships among communitie so that the full scope of the American experience is revealed.

The American artist Alan Gussow once defined the word "place" as "a piece of the environment... claimed by feelings." Imagine the depth of feelings built upon a sense of place passed through generations, even over centuries. The keepers of that treasure are people with long and deep connections with our parklands and cultural landscapes.

America's national parks were places of human feeling long before they became parks. They are ancestral homelands. People lived and died there. They shared emotional, spiritual, intellectual, and sensual perceptions of the land-its sounds, smell, and feel; its skies, rivers, wildlife, plants, rocks, minerals. They knew where to find berries, grasses, deer, fish, and fowl. Knowing and understanding the landscape were matters of identity as well as survival.

We are coming to understand that parks become richer when we see them through the cultures of people whose ancestors once lived there. At Great Sand Dunes National Park in Colorado, the mysterious scars on ponderosa pines were made by the Utes who once peeled bark for medicinal purposes. In Glacier National Park in Montana, elders of the Confederated Salish and Kootenai tribes can identify ancient vegetation patterns through certain place names passed down to them through the ages.

Throughout the National Park Service, this kind of knowledge may be lost as aging bearers of traditional culture die without the opportunity to fully share their deep understanding of the nature and spirit of a place. Place names, migration routes, harvesting practices, prayers and songs may be lost forever. These irreplaceable connections should be nurtured and conserved for future generations.

In Alaska, the Park Service has both the opportunity and the responsibility to assist Alaska's indigenous and rural people in conserving their traditions and culture. The challenge is not to "reconnect" these cultures with the new parklands, but rather to ensure that existing connections are maintained. The legislation that created the parks in Alaska also provided for the consumptive use of the fish, wildlife, and plant resources for subsistence by those people living in rural Alaska-predominantly Alaska's indigenous people-provided natural and healthy fish and wildlife populations are maintained.

Striking a balance between the physical and cultural need for subsistence and the Park Service mission of stewardship will not be easy. This special challenge will require a close working relationship between park managers and rural people. The Park Service needs to make full use of rural-based councils and subsistence commissions in order to gain knowledge about the values and needs of the rural people. The people in turn must be given an opportunity to understand the responsibilities of the Park Service managers and be given the opportunity for meaningful input into resource management plans.

National Park Service's relationships with indigenous and local people must become steeped in understanding, patience, and mutual respect earned over time. The Service should value park staff who choose to remain in one post for extended periods of time so they can more fully understand and work with native and local cultures. The transfer of park personnel from one post to another should no longer be essential for career advancement. Training of park staff is essential to enhance appreciation of these cultures and the value of place-based knowledge. Programs should facilitate the hiring of local people. Through cooperative management approaches, indigenous and local people can participate in the operation of the parks. It is with efforts such as these that the Park Service will become equipped to deal on a case-by-case basis with the diverse needs of America's living cultures.

The diverse ethnic groups and nationalities that worked the farms and factories of a growing nation have also created cultural landscapes worthy of preservation. These special places, formed by traditional land use or the legacy of early transportation systems, bind residents together through shared stories, traditions, and pride in local accomplishments. Visitors looking for authenticity in America treasure them. Communities looking for a way to save their special places have worked across jurisdictional boundaries and joined together to plan for a future that embraces the past. Many have sought National Park Service recognition and assistance to validate the significance of their heritage to the nation. The Service should welcome such efforts.

With no official program and limited funding, these Heritage Area initiatives have already created Federal and local partnerships to conserve and commemorate distinctive regional landscapes. Congress has designated 23 National Heritage Areas that celebrate the past in areas where people still live. Heritage Areas include canal corridors in Georgia, Illinois, and Pennsylvania; river corridors that provided access and power to early settlers; and landscapes that tell the story of big steel, coal, and our agricultural might. All are committed to celebrating the living traditions of the people in the region.

Forging partnerships is the centerpiece of the heritage movement, and the National Park Service should establish a formal program to foster them. Such a program would create opportunities to preserve larger landscapes outside parks. At their best, these partnerships will bring together local, state, and federal agencies to help rehabilitate brownfields, reinvigorate main streets, and reach out to museums, parks and cultural venues, linking them with shared stories and interpretation.

VI. Promoting Outdoor Recreation

- The National Park Service should be an energetic advocate of outdoor recreation and open space conservation, and of the considerable public benefits they provide.
- The Service should serve as a catalyst to encourage collaboration among public and private park a recreation systems at all levels-to build a national network of parks and open spaces across Americ

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For more than two centuries, Americans have been creating public spaces that inspire and enrich our lives. Gardens and commons, parks and playgrounds, forests and wildlife refuges, trails and greenways have furthered values that we treasure as a nation: appreciation of the out-of-doors, caring for our shared natural and cultural heritage, and providing opportunities for personal challenge and adventure.

Since it was created, the Park Service has been an integral partner in conserving the places where Americans find "recreation," or, as some have described it, "re-creation." Pioneer landscape architect Frederick Law Olmsted believed that fresh air, contemplation of nature, and a change from everyday habits improved people's physical health and intellectual vigor. Today, throughout the national parks

and parks at state, regional, and local levels, people of all ages, races, and backgrounds can engage in a broad range of pursuits that enable them to "re-create" and find self-renewal.

None of the early national park visionaries could have imagined how much time Americans of the 21st century would spend indoors, how much physical work would be done for them by machines, or how much stress could build up in the faster pace of contemporary American life. Outdoor recreation has become essential to the mental and physical health of Americans.

The national appetite for outdoor recreation has been well documented in studies such as that of the Outdoor Recreation Resources Review Commission in 1962 and the President's Commission on Americans Outdoors in 1987, among others. Both commissions found that Americans want recreational opportunities "close to home." Ninety percent of the people in one survey in 1999 said parks provided experiences important to their children's development. Yet at the same time, the Centers for Disease Control reported that nearly half of the country's young people are physically inactive.

Nearly forty years ago, the 88th Congress enacted the Outdoor Recreation Act, which declared "that all American people of present and future generations be assured adequate outdoor recreation resources." It stated further that the Federal government should "promote the coordination and development of effective programs relating to outdoor recreation." With the creation of the Bureau of Outdoor Recreation in 1962, succeeded by the Heritage Conservation and Recreation Service in 1977, a federal "focal point" was created to address the recreation needs of the nation. Further legislative authorities strengthened a national leadership role through the enactment of the Land and Water Conservation Fund Act, the National Wild and Scenic Rivers Act, the National Trails System Act, and the Urban Park and Recreation Recovery Act.

In 1981, the National Park Service was given a special role in recreation when it took on the responsibilities of the Heritage Conservation and Recreation Service. Beyond its traditional role of managing national parks, the Service moved to become an active partner with public and private sector organizations to create and to protect parks and opportunities for outdoor recreation at the state and local community level. This mission is carried out through programs that provide assistance and hands-on expertise. The Rivers, Trails, and Conservation Assistance Program works at the grassroots level with local citizens groups and state and local governments to restore nearby rivers, preserve valuable open space, and develop trail and greenway networks. It helps communities achieve their own conservation and recreation goals. All projects are locally-led and managed. Rivers and Trails has helped save 279,000 acres of parks and open spaces, develop 2,227 miles of close-to-home recreational trails, and protect 1,037 river miles.

Through the Land and Water Conservation Fund and Urban Park and Recreation Recovery Program, grants of financial and technical assistance to state and local governments have also helped create outdoor opportunities ranging from baseball fields and biking paths to inner city parks and "tot lots." Setting up local parks and open recreational spaces brings additional benefit by providing wildlife corridors and migratory bird habitat.

One of the greatest challenges for the Park Service and other recreation agencies in the years ahead will be meeting the growing-and often competing-demands of an enthusiastically recreating public. Each year, more people visit our national parks, and the demand for local, close-to-home recreation has never been greater.

The Park Service should serve as a convener and catalyst to encourage the nation's park and recreation professionals to prepare a broad strategic look at America's recreation needs and to build partnerships to meet those needs. The Service should propose that these parties join in creating a national network of parks, preserves, open spaces, greenways and recreation areas touching all communities and accessible to all Americans. This great initiative-an American System of Parks-could provide recreation benefits to all our citizens.

VII. Shaping the Future National Park System

- Expansion of the National Park Service should always be guided by sound scholarship and scientifi

evaluation of potential new parks.

- Units of the park system should be widely recognized as the most outstanding examples of our national heritage. That heritage should be more inclusive of all the different experiences that have contributed to our history as a people. New units should be created to preserve key aspects of America's heritage not presently represented in the system.

To be included in the National Park Service, an area or site must meet rigorous standards for national significance. It is the highest form of recognition the nation can bestow. Though Congress has declared that the areas of the National Park Service "are united through their interrelated purposes...as cumulative expressions of a single national heritage," there exists no grand plan or vision guiding the evolution or growth of the National Park Service. The park system grows and changes in response to congressional and executive branch initiatives, social and economic trends or themes, and immediate threats to important natural or cultural resources.

Park Service standards for evaluating natural and cultural resources should be consistently applied with the benefit of expert scientific and scholarly advice. The public and the Congress should insist that the high honor of being recognized as a contributor to the "cumulative expression of a national heritage" be reserved for sites that are truly outstanding examples of their type. This does not mean, however, that such sites must be limited to spectacular scenery or outstanding architecture. The Park Service should now place a high priority on sites, themes, and stories not well represented, including key aspects of biological diversity, marine areas, African American and Hispanic American history, the histories of other minority groups, social movements, the arts, and literature.

At the same time, growth of the National Park Service should not be limited to expanding the number or size of its units. The Park Service has outstanding opportunities to communicate its stewardship message through means other than the acquisition and management of land. Programs of educational outreach, technical and financial assistance, and various forms of public recognition contribute to the basic mission. Moreover, as these programs build the stewardship ethic that will ultimately help sustain the parks, the parks should build that same ethic to help sustain the quality of heritage resources outside the parks. The Underground Railroad Network to Freedom program and the Chesapeake Bay Gateways and Water Trails program provide examples of initiatives whereby the Park Service can share its message without acquiring new land and management responsibilities.

VIII. Ensuring Institutional Capacity

- The National Park Service must make increased investments in the professional development of its workforce. Training and development must be seen as continuing education that is fundamental to maintain a creative and effective workforce.
- The composition of the workforce must better reflect the diversity and talent of America.
- Adequate funding is needed to accomplish the Park Service mission. Its resources must be organized, managed, and deployed efficiently.

Although the mandates of the 1916 Organic Act remain the foundation of the National Park Service, its mission will continue to evolve as society and conditions change. New talents and abilities are needed to achieve organizational purposes. The Park Service must have the expertise to administer parks as educational resources, protect park resources in landscapes that are increasingly altered by human activity, and fashion broad collaborative relationships with academia, the private sector, state, local, and other federal agencies. It must continue to provide high quality visitor experiences, and present America's unfolding story in a manner that connects with the nation's increasingly diverse population.

The Park Service must identify the kinds of jobs it will need in the future, reconsider the requirements for existing positions, and examine how it will attract and retain people with the talents required. New skills in communications and information technology, business, science, and management will be

needed. Educating its workforce is crucial, and a much larger share of organizational resources must be devoted to continuing education and professional development.

Too often the Park Service has been hesitant to engage outside talent, preferring to look inward for ideas and solutions to problems. This must change. Park staff can no longer be insular, but must work closely with private landowners, local community groups, local governments, and other federal agencies. Cooperation with neighbors is vital to conserve park resources.

The Park Service must recognize that the complexion of America is changing. More minorities must be included in the workforce, which, if more representative of the nation, will in turn attract a broader representative range of park visitors.

The Park Service is this country's largest manager of historic structures-more than 25,000, ranging from Independence Hall and the Vietnam Veterans Memorial to Spanish Colonial churches and slave cabins. According to the Park Service's Strategic Plan, more than half are in a deteriorating condition, requiring more than normal maintenance, and most of these will be considered in "poor" condition in five years. Within that time period, two-thirds of more than 2,000 cultural landscapes will also be in poor condition, unless resources are available to improve them.

Of the 52,000 archaeological sites inventoried (out of the nearly one million believed to exist), the Park Service has assessed the condition of only 4,700 sites, and of those only 31 percent are in good condition. The Service stores over 40 million curatorial objects in facilities that meet only 65 percent of the identified standards necessary to ensure adequate preservation.

Throughout the park system, there are outdated visitor centers, exhibits, audiovisual programs, and a wide range of historic and visitor service facilities needing rehabilitation and upgrading. Basic infrastructure deficiencies are well known and are expressed as a backlog of more than four billion dollars.

On the natural history front, the Service is beginning to develop a picture of the living things and processes at work inside the parks. The Natural Resource Challenge program, now in its second year, is expected to result in more complete inventories and better monitoring systems. There is much that needs to be done to improve natural systems. In spite of earlier efforts, only 19 percent of national park populations of threatened and endangered species have shown improvement. Eighteen percent are stable. The Service manages more than half a million acres of disturbed lands that require restoration, and 4,000 abandoned mines that must be stabilized or restored. There are five million acres of lands infested with non-native plants that must be restored to their natural habitats.

Restoring the natural systems and condition of facilities in our parks should be a long-term national priority. Some progress is underway through the Fee Demonstration Program and from funding for the Natural Resource Challenge. However, unless there is a continuing commitment to provide the substantial funding needed to heal the condition of the parks, further deterioration is assured. To deal with deficiencies and to provide resources necessary to meet this challenge, adequate funding is required.

Private philanthropy has played an important role in advancing both the national parks and the Park Service. In the years before Congress appropriated funds for parklands, and later, when land acquisition needs exceeded available appropriations, private donations were responsible for substantial additions to the park system. Other donations have contributed significantly to park planning, development, management, and education.

Private citizen involvement with national parks has a long history. In recent years the number of volunteer "friends" groups supporting individual parks has grown significantly. These groups provide tens of millions of dollars each year to support individual park operations and enrich the quality of public service offerings. The work of the friends groups is extremely valuable to the Park Service.

The National Park Foundation exemplifies the trend in private sector support. Established by Congress in 1967, this non-profit organization was created exclusively to support the national parks. During the past decade the level of support to the parks has shown a marked increase. In 2000, the Foundation provided almost $25 million in grants for a wide range of projects and programs throughout the park

system. The support comes from individuals, other foundations, and corporations.

National parks will always be dependent on federal appropriations for their primary support. However, the opportunity to provide additional private resources for the parks should be encouraged. The added value expressed through private giving is a measure of the importance placed on this revered American institution.

National parks are attractive places for volunteers. Senior citizens volunteer to pursue life-long learning opportunities and to contribute value to their country. Young people volunteer to discover the world and acquire new skills and knowledge. Each year, more than 100,000 citizens offer their time and talent to support the mission of the Park Service, especially in the area of visitor services. These are people of all ages and backgrounds with interests as diverse as America itself. The Service has the potential to attract even more volunteers to service in the parks. Seventy-six million workers will retire within the next 10 to 30 years. The Service should develop a sophisticated volunteer outreach program to recruit this talent.

Conclusion

As a nation, we protect our heritage to ensure a more complete understanding of the forces that shape our lives and future. National parks are key institutions created for that purpose, chapters in the ever-expanding story of America. It is the founding mission of the Park Service to insure that these special places will never be impaired, and will be available forever to inspire and inform future generations.

This report has attempted to illuminate the multi-dimensional mission of the Park Service and suggest how the organization might prepare for the future. It builds on Park Service mandates and the demonstrated importance of parks in society. It emphasizes the considerable potential of the Park Service to contribute to education and enlightenment. It acknowledges new strategies to sustain natural systems and endorses the growing involvement of scientists and scholars in all aspects of Park Service work. It recognizes efforts underway to integrate living cultures into park life, and supports the collaborative work of building an exemplary nationwide outdoor recreation network. The National Park System Advisory Board applauds the accomplishments of the Park Service in these and other areas in recent years. But more can be done.

The National Park Service has a twenty-first century responsibility of great importance. It is to proclaim anew the meaning and value of parks, conservation, and recreation; to expand the learning and research occurring in parks and share that knowledge broadly; and to encourage all Americans to experience these special places. As a people, our quality of life-our very health and well-being-depends in the most basic way on the protection of nature, the accessibility of open space and recreation opportunities, and the preservation of landmarks that illustrate our historic continuity. By caring for the parks and conveying the park ethic, we care for ourselves and act on behalf of the future. The larger purpose of this mission is to build a citizenry that is committed to conserving its heritage and its home on earth.

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